How Can We Biblically Discern Truth from Error in Modern Prosperity Teachings? Sixbert SANGWA • January 21, 2025

The prosperity gospel represents one of the most dangerous theological distortions in contemporary

Christianity. Through compelling but deceptive rhetoric, its proponents—often charismatic televangelists—have led millions astray with an enticing yet unbiblical promise: that sincere faith in Christ automatically leads to physical health, material abundance, and financial success in this present life. Historically, the Apostolic church encountered false teachers who corrupted the gospel's truth, using it either

for financial gain or as a means to manipulate divine power (Acts 8:9–24; Acts 19:11–20). Similar distortions of

biblical teaching have appeared throughout church history. Following the great Pentecostal revival of 1906 (Azusa Street Revival), Satan launched a counterattack through the prosperity gospel movement, which emerged in the 1950s as a post-World War II Pentecostal phenomenon, primarily through Oral Roberts, an American televangelist. His influential books, including "If You Need Healing, Do These Things (2010) and "The Miracle of Seed-Faith" (2017), helped spread the movement's message. In the 1980s, televangelists Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart further popularized these teachings through their extensive ministries. E.W. Kenyon and Kenneth E. Hagin also played pivotal roles in shaping the movement's development. Kenyon's writings influenced Hagin, who is considered the father of the Word of Faith movement (1989). Notable prosperity gospel proponents include Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, T.D. Jakes, John

Hagee, Creflo Dollar, Paula White, Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, David Oyedepo, Todd White, Steven Furtick,

Joseph Prince, Jesse Duplantis, Joyce Meyer, and Juanita Bynum. These televangelists have promoted and

commercialized prosperity teachings through radio and television networks like Trinity Broadcast Network (TBN). Their influence has spread beyond American borders, reaching audiences across Africa, South America, and Asia. For a comprehensive overview of prosperity theology and its proponents, you can refer to this Wikipedia article on Prosperity Theology and this detailed YouTube series: The Prosperity Gospel. We have also explored these topics previously, so you may gain more insights from articles such as: "Has Christianity Been Hijacked by Prosperity Gospel?" (May 2024), "Is the Trinity Broadcasting Network a Force for Good or Concern in the Christian Community?" (June 2024), and "Are Some Theological Institutions Serving the Devil's Purpose?" (June 2024) The prosperity gospel movement centers around four key teachings that fundamentally misinterpret biblical truth. • First, proponents claim that Jesus' death on the cross purchased complete physical healing and material

suggest that Jesus died not only for spiritual salvation but also to eliminate sickness and financial poverty. • Second, they teach about a present-day material inheritance, claiming that the Abrahamic covenant

prosperity for believers in this present life. They distort passages like Isaiah 53:5 and John 10:10 to

- guarantees vast material and financial blessings for contemporary believers. According to this view, faith in Jesus automatically leads to tangible earthly prosperity and possessions. • Third, the movement promotes a "give to get" principle, where financial giving to churches, ministries, and
- even individual ministers (often self-portrayed as "men of God") is presented as the key to receiving material wealth and blessings. They teach that the amount of prosperity received directly correlates with the amount given, essentially turning giving into a spiritual investment strategy. • Finally, the "name it and claim it" doctrine suggests that believers can access physical and material

blessings through faith declarations and prayer. Misusing verses like Hebrews 11:1which states that "faith is

the substance of things hoped for," they claim that faith literally creates material reality. This Word of Faith

teaching asserts that sufficient faith guarantees freedom from sickness and poverty, while continued suffering is blamed on lack of faith. Followers are encouraged to speak positively and claim their desired blessings as if already received, avoiding negative speech that might manifest unwanted outcomes. How does the Prosperity Gospel contradict Biblical Christianity? Scripture clearly shows that physical, material, and financial prosperity are not reliable indicators of God's favor or level of salvation, just as suffering does not indicate His displeasure. Jesus explicitly taught us to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"

(Matt. 6:33), promising that other things would be added according to God's will and purpose, not as a

guaranteed exchange for faith. The Bible warns that material prosperity can become a spiritual trap (Luke

12:15), while it presents suffering as a potential blessing (Matt. 5:10; 1 Peter 3:14). Scripture presents a balanced view—the Christian life isn't defined by constant prosperity or endless suffering. Instead, believers may experience both seasons of abundance and hardship (Phil. 4:12), with God distributing gifts—whether spiritual or material—according to His sovereign purpose for each believer's life and ministry. God's Word cautions against becoming attached to riches (Ps. 62:10) and instructs wealthy believers not to place their trust in material wealth (1 Tim. 6:17). Despite this biblical teaching, prosperity gospel preachers and televangelists continue to mislead countless people worldwide with their false message that true faith in Christ guarantees physical, material, and financial prosperity in this life. In contrast to these prosperity gospel teachings, Scripture reveals the following truths: • The Apostolic preaching emphasizes humanity's spiritual condition - our separation from God due to sin (Rom 3:23,Eph 2:1-3). Scripture reveals that Jesus died primarily to address our spiritual death and restore our relationship with God (Acts 2:38;5:31;10:43;13:38;26:18). The gospel's focus was never on earthly prosperity, but on the eternal spiritual riches we inherit through Christ (Eph 1:3,Col 1:13-14). While His death

us in Heaven at the final resurrection (1 Cor 15:42-44, Phil 3:20-21), where we will receive glorified, immortal bodies free from all corruption and weakness.

11:39-40;13:14).

eternal judgment.

• God promised Abraham that he would inherit the world (Rom. 4:13), a promise ultimately fulfilled through Jesus Christ. Indeed, God's greatest blessing is salvation and the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ, the Son of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). All who believe in Jesus Christ become sons and daughters of Abraham and coheirs of the promised inheritance (Gal. 3:29). Through faith—the same faith Abraham demonstrated—we receive salvation's blessings: forgiveness of sins, justification, adoption, and are sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our everlasting inheritance (Gal. 3:7–9). As members of Christ's bride, the Church, we await His return to gather His people as the Marriage Supper of the Lamb

approaches. Only then, will we and our faithful ancestors fully receive this promised inheritance (Heb.

and resurrection secure our complete restoration - body and soul - the fullness of these blessings awaits

• Biblical giving flows from understanding that everything already belongs to God - we are merely stewards of His resources (Ps. 24:1, Hag. 2:8). Unlike the prosperity gospel's "give to get" mentality, true Christian giving stems from a grateful heart that recognizes God's ownership of all things (1 Chr. 29:14, James 1:17). God's grace and provision are not earned through giving - He causes rain to fall on both the righteous and unrighteous (Matt. 5:45). While the Old Testament established the principle of tithing (Mal. 3:10), this

pointed forward to New Testament giving, which emphasizes cheerful, Spirit-led generosity flowing from a

managing what God has entrusted to us (2 Cor. 9:8-11,1 Pet. 4:10), remembering that what He desires most

themselves as special mediators between God and people, similar to Old Testament priests who received

contradicts Scripture, which clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is our ultimate High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16) who

heart surrendered to God (2 Cor. 9:7). Whether we have much or little, our focus should be on faithfully

is not our money but our hearts (Prov. 23:26). Furthermore, prosperity gospel preachers often position

offerings from the 11 tribes of Israel. They claim that, like the Levites who were supported by the other

tribes to perform temple duties, they too deserve financial support to do "God's work." However, this

has made all believers a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). The Apostle Paul himself set a powerful example by working as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3) to avoid being a financial burden to the churches he served (2 Thess. 3:8-9). By claiming this mediatorial role and demanding financial support as Old Testament priests did, prosperity preachers not only deny the sufficiency of Christ's priesthood and the universal priesthood of all believers but also contradict the apostolic example of humble service. • When the Apostle Paul earnestly prayed for personal healing, Jesus responded, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"(2 Cor. 12:7–9). This wasn't due to Paul lacking faith rather, God has not promised complete physical healing in this present life. In contrast, prosperity preachers, as ministers of Satan (2 Cor. 11:13-15), deceive people by appealing to their worldly desires and lusts. James warns us that sometimes*"you ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures"*(James 4:3). These false teachers lead many to eternal destruction by making them chase material wealth instead of Christ (1 Tim. 6:9-10). True healing and

restoration await believers at the resurrection on the last day, while those who follow these deceivers face

So, why do people believe this false teaching? Prosperity gospel teachers prey on their audience's desires for

material provision, social position, personal power, and the deep human need to feel valued and significant.

Rather than emphasizing Christ, eternity, and God's glory, they focus on achieving earthly success and "living"

your best life now." The teaching particularly attracts followers in economically disadvantaged communities and

developing nations because it promises social empowerment and escape from poverty and illness. Some are

also drawn to it because it provides a religious justification for materialistic desires.

Tragically, many believers have fallen into ritualistic practices that more closely resemble occult traditions than biblical Christianity. They designate specific locations - mountaintops, forests, rivers, or caves - as their personal "prayer mountains" or "encounter grounds," believing these places hold special spiritual power. Like ancient pagans seeking oracles, they bring detailed lists of material demands, treating God more like a cosmic vending machine than the sovereign Lord of creation. This practice particularly flourishes in some Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, where the true gospel of salvation through Christ has been replaced with a pseudospiritual quest for material prosperity and supernatural experiences. The result is a form of syncretistic Christianity where biblical truth is mixed with elements of traditional spiritualism and materialism. Many

adherents, having never been properly discipled in sound doctrine, don't realize they're following a distorted

version of Christianity that bears little resemblance to the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). Instead of

worshipping God for who He is and seeking first His kingdom (Matt. 6:33), they pursue Him only for what they

emphasize Christ's sacrificial death for our sins. As Paul writes, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew

hope to receive, much like the crowds who followed Jesus merely for the loaves and fishes (John 6:26).

When sharing the gospel with those influenced by prosperity teaching, focus on three key aspects. First,

no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). Through His work on the cross, Christ redeemed us from the law's curse and brought us salvation's blessing (Gal. 3:13–14). Second, direct their focus toward eternal blessings rather than temporal ones. Peter reminds us of our "inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven" (1 Peter 1:4). This heavenly perspective helps shift their focus from earthly prosperity to eternal riches in Christ. Third, help them understand the biblical view of suffering. Jesus Himself was a "man of sorrows" (Isa. 53:3), and Scripture teaches that suffering often precedes glory (Rom. 8:17). Though we may face hardships in this life (Phil. 1:29), God promises complete restoration in the world to come (Rev. 21:4). **Concluding Exhortation** The prosperity gospel represents a dangerous distortion of biblical Christianity that exchanges the true riches of Christ for temporal material gain. By promising health, wealth, and success as indicators of God's favor, it

contradicts the core message of the gospel - that salvation comes through faith in Christ's sacrificial death and

This false teaching is particularly insidious because many of its practitioners knowingly or unknowingly employ

evil spirits and occult practices to perform signs and wonders, deeply ensnaring their followers in spiritual

The biblical response is to return to the pure gospel of grace (Eph. 2:8-9), understanding that while God

mixing biblical truth with elements of materialism, traditional spiritualism, and occult practices.

bondage. This demonic influence makes it extremely difficult to lead prosperity gospel adherents to genuine

faith in Christ, as they must not only recognize doctrinal error but also be delivered from spiritual oppression.

The teaching particularly harms vulnerable populations by promoting a transactional relationship with God and

provides for His children (Matt. 6:31-33), true Christian prosperity lies in our spiritual inheritance in Christ (Eph.

1:3). As we live in the last hour (1 John 2:18), with Jesus at the door knocking (Rev. 3:20), we must heed His call and join in saying "Come!" (Rev. 22:17). As believers, we are called to seek first His kingdom (Matt. 6:33), content in whatever circumstances we face (Phil. 4:11-13), knowing that our ultimate treasure is not found in

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earthly riches but in Christ Himself (Col. 2:3), who is soon to return (Rev. 22:20).

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